

LET'S Talk

WINTER 2002

HEALTHY BODIES • SOUND MINDS • A SAFE PLACE TO WORK

Holiday Stress ❄️

THE HOLIDAYS — a time of festivities, shopping, entertaining, religious observances, family gatherings, decorating and ... stress! Between the extra demands we place on ourselves and the expectations of the season, is it any wonder that most of us feel some stress during the holiday season? The articles in this edition of *Let's Talk* address stress and happiness and provide some helpful hints to help manage the holiday season.

Understanding the Stress/Health Connection

STRESS EXISTS IN YOUR MIND — but it's also evident in your stomach, heart, muscles and even your toes.

"In fact, stress may affect every cell in your body," says Ronald Glaser, Ph.D., a researcher at Ohio State University Medical School.

During stressful times, your body produces various chemicals, including cortisol, an immune-suppressing hormone. The more cortisol produced, the weaker your immune cells become and the more susceptible you are to illness.

"A one-day stressor isn't going to make a big change in your risk of getting a cold, for example," says Glaser. "But a chronic stressor that lasts a few weeks could dampen your immune response and create a risk of disease."

Migraine headaches, sleep disorders, backaches, skin rashes, fatigue, irritability, headache, depression, worry, mood swings, chest pain, anxiety, upset stomach, ulcers and high blood pressure are common reactions to stress.

By gaining a better understanding of the stress/disease connection, you can reduce your stress and, in turn, improve your health and well-being.

Keeping Stress in Check

No one can avoid all stress — and a certain amount actually is good for



you. But it's best to keep unhealthy levels in check. The following steps can help you control everyday stress:

- **RECOGNIZE YOUR STRESS SIGNALS.** Once you're aware of your stressors, you'll have a better idea of when you're stressed and can take steps to reduce them.
- **EXERCISE.** Aerobic workouts can release pent-up frustrations while producing endorphins, brain chemicals that counteract stress.
- **EAT A HEALTHFUL DIET.** A balanced diet can help stabilize your mood.
- **COMMUNICATE WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY.** Social ties relieve stress and contribute to a positive attitude.
- **SPEND TIME ENJOYING YOUR HOBBIES.** Doing so allows you to focus on a pleasurable activity instead of your problems.
- **AVOID ALCOHOL AND DRUGS.** Using alcohol or other drugs to relieve stress only masks symptoms and can worsen stress in the long run.
- **TRY RELAXATION TECHNIQUES.** Meditation, visualization, deep-breathing exercises, yoga and listening to relaxation tapes can help you relax.

in the know

Late-Breaking Health News

>> Super-sized fast-food meals present a significant obstacle to overcoming America's growing obesity problem.

"Bigger is rarely better when it comes to food. The true price of larger portions is larger calorie and saturated-fat numbers — and larger waistlines," according to a report by the National Alliance for Nutrition and Activity, a coalition of groups that promote health and fitness.

The report found a large order of fries at McDonald's comes with 157 percent more calories than the smaller size. A Classic Cinnabon cinnamon roll packs twice the calories (740) and three times the fat as a Minibon.

Nationwide, 60 percent of adults are overweight, and an estimated 300,000 people a year die from illnesses caused or worsened by excessive weight.

Diabetes is linked to obesity, and overweight people are also at greater risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, kidney failure and several forms of cancer.

The Center for Science in the Public Interest, a consumer advocacy group in Washington, D.C., recommends fast-food restaurants be required to post the calorie content of their meals next to the prices.

>> Cigarette smoking turns the body into a breeding ground for infections, which can lead to artery-clogging plaque. Current and ex-smokers who had common chronic ailments — such as bronchitis, ulcers, urinary-tract infections and gum disease — were more than three times as likely to develop early atherosclerosis than people without such infections, according to a study in *Stroke: Journal of the American Heart Association*. Infections also promoted artery disease in people exposed to secondhand smoke.



>> TEENAGERS ARE LESS LIKELY TO START HAVING SEX if their mothers are involved in their lives, they have a close relationship with them and the moms stress the importance of education, according to a survey published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

The results were most consistent among younger teens in the eighth and ninth grades.


But simply warning teens about the dangers of early sex or telling them they shouldn't have sex wasn't enough to stop them from being sexually active, according to the survey. Besides talking to their children, parents need to know their teens' friends and speak with their friends' parents.

The survey also found many mothers' takes on their teens' sex lives were inaccurate. When teenagers reported they hadn't had sexual intercourse, almost all their mothers had made the same assessment. But only 50 percent of moms knew their children were sexually active.

See your physician for guidance and advice regarding a specific health condition.

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SPECIAL REPORTS

- 540** How to Quit Smoking
- 541** Sensible Weight Loss
- 542** Lowering Your Cholesterol
- 543** Reducing Your Stress
- 544** Walking for Fitness
- 545** Workstation Comfort
- 546** Fixing an Aching Back
- 547** Start An Exercise Program
- 548** Controlling Allergies
- 549** Lowering Health-Care Costs
- 550** Living With Arthritis
- 551** Dealing With Headaches
- 552** High Blood Pressure

2003 Vitality's Annual Wellness Test



WELCOME TO our annual Personal Wellness Test. Rate your wellness by adding up your points and comparing the total with the rankings at the end of the test. You can improve your score and reduce your health risks by gradually making positive changes.

RATE YOUR DIET

1. Do you eat 6 to 11 servings of bread, cereal, rice and pasta every day?

- ☐ Usually — 6
- ☐ Sometimes — 4
- ☐ Never — 0

2. How many times a week do you skip a meal?

- ☐ One or fewer — 6
- ☐ Two or three — 4
- ☐ Four or more — 0

3. How many of your lunches and dinners are meatless and low in fat in a typical week?

- ☐ Six or more — 6
- ☐ Four or five — 3
- ☐ None — 0

4. How often do you choose nonfat and low-fat food products instead of high-fat ones at the supermarket?

- ☐ Almost always — 6
- ☐ Occasionally — 4
- ☐ Never — 0

RATE YOUR FITNESS

5. Do you look for ways to get more exercise while going

about your daily routine? (For example: using stairs instead of an elevator and walking instead of driving short distances.)

- ☐ Often — 6
- ☐ Sometimes — 4
- ☐ Never — 2

6. How much time do you spend exercising in a typical week?

- ☐ 90 minutes or more — 8
- ☐ 60 to 89 minutes — 6
- ☐ 1 to 59 — 4
- ☐ None at all — 0

7. Do you regularly perform stretching and flexibility exercises?

- ☐ Yes, every week — 4
- ☐ Yes, once or twice a month — 2
- ☐ No — 0

RATE YOUR HEALTH HABITS

8. How would you characterize your tobacco use?

- ☐ I've never smoked or chewed tobacco — 8
- ☐ I quit smoking two or more years ago — 5

- ☐ I'm trying to quit smoking — 4
- ☐ I presently smoke — 0

9. How would you characterize your alcohol use?

- ☐ I drink no more than two drinks a day — 6
- ☐ I often have more than two drinks a day — 0

10. How would you characterize your drug use?

- ☐ I don't use illegal drugs — 8
- ☐ I use illegal drugs — 0

11. How would you characterize your sleep habits?

- ☐ I almost always get seven to ten hours of sleep — 6
- ☐ I sometimes get seven to ten hours of sleep — 4
- ☐ I hardly ever get that much — 0

12. Do you work out, practice relaxation exercises, call a friend or family member or take other corrective steps when under stress?

- ☐ Always — 6
- ☐ Sometimes — 4
- ☐ Never — 0

13. Do you always wear a seat belt when in a moving motor vehicle?

- ☐ Yes — 8
- ☐ Sometimes — 4
- ☐ Never — 0

RATE YOUR SELF-CARE

14. Do you schedule regular medical screening tests as advised by your doctor?

- ☐ Yes — 6
- ☐ No — 0

15. Are your immunizations up to date?

- ☐ Yes — 6
- ☐ No — 0

16. Do you self-treat minor health problems, such as headaches, colds and the flu, instead of going to the doctor?

- ☐ Usually — 4
- ☐ Sometimes — 2
- ☐ Never — 0

TOTAL SCORE _____

EVALUATE YOUR SCORE

80 to 100 points

Well done. Your wellness profile is above average. You have excellent health habits and take good care of yourself. Keep up the good work and avoid known health risks, and you should live a long and healthy life.

50 to 79 points

Good job. You have good health habits and take pretty good care of yourself. Review your wellness-test answers and identify those areas in which you scored lowest. A little fine-tuning could get you in great shape.

20 to 49 points

You're headed in the right direction, but several crucial wellness areas need your immediate attention. Review your answers and determine your weaknesses, then take appropriate action to improve your health.

19 points and below

To improve your health, take a hard look at your health habits and overall lifestyle, then commit to making positive changes. Check with your doctor or your company's health-care administrator if you need assistance.

for your information

Complementary Health-Care News

>> Including almonds in a healthful diet may help reduce cholesterol levels.

Adults who substituted 74 gm. of almonds (about 2 oz.) for other foods reduced their LDL ("bad") cholesterol by nearly 10 percent after one month. Adults who consumed fewer nuts also saw their cholesterol levels decline, researchers report in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association*.

However, adding nuts to a diet already sufficient in calories and fat could lead to weight gain, so be sure to reduce calories elsewhere.

Adults who ate 2 oz. of almonds also lowered their ratio of LDL to HDL ("good") cholesterol by 12 percent after one month.

>> A CUP OF BLUEBERRIES A DAY MAY KEEP "SENIOR MOMENTS" AWAY. In a study at the Center on Aging at Tufts University in Boston, the fruit reduced age-related brain damage in rats and also prevented mental decline in mice genetically engineered to develop Alzheimer's-like plaques in their brains.



The findings, coupled with early results from a human study, suggest eating blueberries can help prevent the mental decline that often accompanies aging.

Free radicals, cell-damaging products of normal metabolism, can injure brain tissue. Antioxidants — found in high doses in blueberries — help prevent this damage. But some researchers believe blueberries' brain-protecting power seems to directly influence the way neurons communicate in the brain.

FOH

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Ver. 1

DIGEST

The right kind of fat can be good for your heart. Eating the polyunsaturated, omega-3 fatty acids found in seafood may reduce your risk of a heart attack, according to recent studies. What's more, middle-age and older people may reduce their risk of heart disease shortly after adding one or two servings per week of fatty fish such as salmon, herring and mackerel to their diets. **VOD571**

University of Washington Health Science and Medical Affairs, Seattle.

Cool noodles to room temperature before adding fresh herbs and vegetables to a pasta salad — so heat doesn't cause them to wilt.

The New Food Lover's Tiptonary by Sharon Tyler Herbst, William Morrow & Co., 2002, \$16.95.

Eat at least two and a half hours before doing yoga. All the twisting can upset a full stomach.

Self, 350 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10017, monthly, \$15/yr.

Home boys. More than half of single American males ages 18 to 24 live at home with one or both parents, compared with 43 percent of single females in that age group.

U.S. Census Bureau, Suitland, MD.

Dentists recommend women on the Pill have teeth pulled during the last week of their menstrual cycles. Those using the Pill had a 31 percent incidence of painful dry socket when they had extractions done during the first 22 days of their cycles, one study found.

Ladies' Home Journal, 100 Park Ave., New York, NY 10017, monthly, \$19.95/yr.

Wool gives weight to the construction of business suits and ensures wearability for years. Even suits worn in summer usually contain some wool fabric.

Professional Image by Ann A. Cooper, South-Western, 2003, \$13.95.